

Seconds

by

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DESCRIPTION

Sue, a fire fighter and EMT, comes upon a car accident and tries to save the young woman trapped in the car - though the young woman does not want to be saved. In fact, she drove herself off the road to end her own misery. Sue cannot let the woman die - but the decision is not all in her hands.

CHARACTERS

- Sue, a firefighter
- Hannah, young woman

NOTE: Ethnicity of the characters does not matter. SUE should speak with a soft drawl.

TIME

- Late in the evening.

PLACE

- Side of the road off a major highway

MISCELLANEOUS SOUNDS

- Car crash
- Night sounds: crickets, wind, etc.

NOTE: The characters remain mostly stationary throughout the play, so they should be put into relatively comfortable positions. However, because HANNAH is in a wrecked car, she should be placed in any position but completely upright. Regardless of the positions, they should be just far enough apart to touch fingertip to fingertip and with some strain to grasp each other's hand. No makeup need be used for HANNAH to indicate injuries.

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In the darkness the audience hears the sound of a severe car crash, loud enough to be almost physically painful. A rotating light appears, as if a fire truck is on the scene. Lights come up to reveal HANNAH; the lights should indicate night and should be dim. SUE, dressed in regular fire fighter's garb and holding a large flashlight, enters crawling. Much of the lighting for the play will

come from SUE's powerful flashlight. There are night sounds in the background; they underscore quietly throughout.

SUE

Anybody there? Can you hear me? Shit, what a mess. Careful.
Careful. Hey, anybody there? I hope somebody is there.

There is a groan from HANNAH.

HANNAH

Go away.

SUE

Hey!

(shouts to someone offstage)

Live one!

(back to HANNAH)

Are you hurt? Where are you hurt? Talk to me.

HANNAH

Go away.

Points her flashlight and sees HANNAH; shouts again.

SUE

It's a woman. Looks bad. Get medical down here, quick.

(as if listening)

Okay. Okay. I'll do what I can.

(to herself)

That is not good. Not good at all. Can you hear me?

HANNAH

Go away.

SUE

Don't know if you heard that, but we got a crack team of medics, we just can't get 'em down here yet. You flipped, and the car is about ready to slide down the embankment to the river. We need to stabilize it before we can get you out. Tie it down like Gulliver. They're bringing in the equipment now. Does this make sense to you? Don't go away on me. I can see you.

HANNAH

Leave me.

SUE

Not in my job description. You in pain?

HANNAH

Doesn't. Matter.

SUE

See if you can touch my hand. Come on, see if you can.

HANNAH refuses to reach out.

SUE

Once we steady the car we can get the jaws of life down here and get you out.

HANNAH

Don't want. Out.

SUE

Course you do. Come on, touch my hand.

HANNAH again refuses to reach out. Several beats in silence.

SUE

Man, I wish they'd get down here. Are you still there?

HANNAH

For now.

SUE

What's your name?

HANNAH

Doesn't. Matter.

SUE

Come on, don't do this. Play along with me, please.

HANNAH

Hannah.

SUE

Thanks. Thanks. Mine's Sue. Hannah, we need to talk.

HANNAH

You talk.

SUE

I need to ask you things. It's the drill. What happened?

HANNAH

Gave up. Control.

SUE

How? Don't go away on me, Hannah. Stay here.

HANNAH

Hands off.

SUE

Did you fall asleep? Alcohol?

HANNAH

I was. Angry. I. Aimed. For the. River.

SUE

Aimed? We'll get you out. Got a good crew up there. Would you touch my hand?

HANNAH

No.

SUE

Okay, cool. Just keep talking to me. I'll keep talking to you. Aimed?

HANNAH

You talk. Too much.

SUE

Regular chatterbox. Vaccinated with a phonograph needle, my mom used to say. Motor mouth to my brothers. Why were you angry?

HANNAH

Long story. Why. Send. You.

SUE

That's a short story. Newest meat in the company.

HANNAH

Woman.

SUE

Yeah. Drew the short straw. Second time. I could use your long story right about now, Hannah. Hannah?

(to herself)

Where the fuck are they?

HANNAH

Don't worry. You. Doing fine.

SUE

Who were you angry at—boyfriend? Husband? I get angry at mine all the time. Seems like they're built for it.

HANNAH cries out in pain.

SUE

What is it? What hurts?

HANNAH

Remembering.

SUE

Good, okay, at least things are opening up. I think. What?

HANNAH

Let me. Go.

SUE

Can't. I have to help you escape.

HANNAH

Damaged.

SUE

That's the shock talking. You got angry at someone—right? They do you some wrong? Keep it going, Hannah. We'll do the long story in pieces. Fill me in.

HANNAH

Betrayal.

SUE

I can relate to betrayal. We're kissing cousins. I got dumped at the altar once. Not lying to you or Jesus. Slam-bang on my keester.

HANNAH

No.

SUE

Right on my can, rump, fat ass. Any way you fry it up, that's where I landed.

HANNAH

Keester. Funny.

SUE

Mama said I had a laugh track in that phonograph needle. But I didn't let it get me down—couldn't. That's when I got this job. People have had to go a distance to accept me, but they are. Mostly. You can fight it.

HANNAH

You fight.

SUE

You can't give up.

HANNAH

Quiet.

SUE

You're sounding like you want to die. It's not in our nature. People always have second thoughts. Say yes, you do have second thoughts.

HANNAH

No. Seconds.

SUE

You're just talking out of your hurt. No one had a harder life than Mama, but she came out loving life like it was fresh-baked bread. Pain's no excuse, she used to say. I'm a great fan of Scarlett O'Hara: Tomorrow's another day. Anything's possible.

HANNAH

Leave.

SUE

Come on, give me your hand.

HANNAH

No.

SUE

They should be getting here soon. Somebody should be getting here soon.

HANNAH

Scarlett?

SUE

What?

HANNAH

Promise me.

SUE

What?

HANNAH

No machines.

SUE

What?

HANNAH

No machines.

SUE

I can't promise that. That's what we do—we save lives. Yours included.

HANNAH

Mine.

SUE

It's ours, now. Not in your hands.

Lines overlap, as if SUE is not really listening.

HANNAH

Mine—

SUE

Our job is to get you out of this car and into a hospital—

HANNAH

—give back—

SUE

They fix you. You soldier on—

HANNAH

—let go—

SUE

That's the drill. That's my drill. That's why we do this. You have to do it.

HANNAH

Delete.

SUE

You don't have the right!

HANNAH

Go. Empty.

SUE

Dammit, Hannah!

HANNAH

Not. Much comfort. You. Leave.

HANNAH's last word is interrupted by a cry of sharp pain.

SUE

What's happening? Tell me.

HANNAH

Feel—back—arm—

SUE

That's good! That's good! That means the nerves are working. Hannah? Don't leave me. We're ten minutes into a beautiful friendship here, aren't we?

HANNAH

Not true.

SUE

Hannah, I can't let you go. I can't let you go. I have to bring you out. You don't know how much out of my hands it is. I have to be your second thoughts.

HANNAH

Away.

SUE

It's not just about you, Hannah. I told you I got the short straw. Not true—I asked for it. You're the second—the second time. They didn't want me to come, but I had to. I couldn't lose again.

HANNAH

My life. Not your. Second chance.

SUE

I couldn't reach her. She stretched her hand out to me. I tried to wish my bones longer. I thought that if I could just get her hand—I could be a root. The light ran out.

HANNAH

Light. Heavy.

SUE

What?

HANNAH

No light. To give. You.

SUE

Not true! We all have something to give. I'm sure you do. It's part of the drill.

(as if hearing something)

Did you hear that? They're having trouble getting the equipment down here. But the medics are on the way—crack team. Really sharp. Hannah, don't check out. Too early for checking out.

HANNAH

Breathing. Through. Jaws. Of. Life.

SUE

Yeah, me too. I notice you have your seatbelt on. Good practice.

HANNAH

Ironic. Crickets.

SUE listens.

SUE

Yeah. Strange, quiet, huh? They should be here any time now.

There are several beats of nothing but the night silence filled with the sounds of crickets, etc.

SUE

Hannah? Hannah?

HANNAH

Here.

Hannah, are you scared? SUE

Numb. HANNAH

I'm scared. SUE

New meat. HANNAH

Don't leave. SUE

Gone. HANNAH

Give me your hand. SUE

HANNAH reaches out as far as she can. SUE, stretching, is able to grasp it.

Good. Now you won't fly away. I've got you. Rooted. SUE

Sorry. Release. You. HANNAH

No! Don't! Tie me down! Don't lose me!
(to offstage) SUE

Hurry up! Hurry up!
(back to HANNAH)

Hannah?

Night sounds.

BLACKOUT